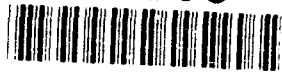


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**DEFENSIVE CULMINATION:
A Useful Piece of Theory?**

**A Monograph
by
Major Michael H. Esper
Infantry**



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**School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
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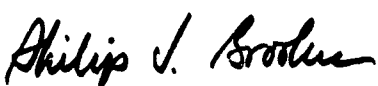
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ABSTRACT

DEFENSIVE CULMINATION: A USEFUL PIECE OF THEORY by
MAJ Michael H. Esper, USA, 46 pages.

This monograph examines the usefulness of defensive culmination to the operational level planner. A working definition of the theoretical concept is advanced and then examined against the backdrops of historical campaigns, current doctrine, and futuristic concepts.

The theoretical concept of defensive culmination is not as well explained by the great theoreticians as the concept of offensive culmination. The works of Clausewitz, Jomini, Sun Tzu, and Mao are analyzed for evidence of the theory. Once defined, the theory is further illustrated by the introduction of paradigms depicting an attacker's and a defender's combat power over time.

A criteria is introduced which is used to examine the usefulness of defensive culmination to operational level commanders and planners. Two historical campaigns, the 1940 campaign for France and Slim's 1944 Burma campaign, are studied for evidence of defensive culmination being used. Current U. S. Army thinking, AirLand Battle doctrine, is examined for the appearance of the theoretical concept at the operational level. Finally, the emerging U. S. Army operational concept, AirLand Battle-Future, is evaluated for indications of defensive culmination.

Whether the defense ends in Clausewitz's 'flashing sword of vengeance' or the risk of Slim's retreat to the Imphal plain, the monograph concludes that defensive culmination is a useful tool for the operational level planner. Either way the defender must seize the initiative from the attacker and develop the situation in such a manner so as to defeat his enemy. The defender's attempt to set these conditions for victory may well depend on how accurately he judges and applies the concept of defensive culmination.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz in his masterful work concerning the theory of war, On War, postulated a concept which he called "the culminating point of the attack."¹ Critical analyses of campaigns which both preceded and followed Clausewitz's work lend credibility to his assertion. Historically, his theory of an offensive culminating point has proven to be a useful tool to the operational level planner. In fact, the United States Army has incorporated the concept into its capstone warfighting document, FM 100-5 Operations.²

However, Clausewitz did not devote any chapters in On War to the antithetical concept of 'culminating point of the defense.' Neither does the United States Army directly discuss the idea of defensive culmination in its current AirLand Battle (ALB) doctrine nor in its emerging operational concept, AirLand Battle-Future. Nevertheless, both the current doctrine and the unfolding operational concept are exercised using scenarios with the United States beginning a conventional war on the defense at the operational level. If the idea of offensive culmination has proven useful to the designers of campaigns in the past, then could not the concept of defensive culmination be

equally useful to future operational level planners,
and if so, how?

This monograph will provide a working definition of defensive culmination by examining some of the works of classic military theorists for evidence of its appearance. These theorists will include: the already mentioned master - Carl von Clausewitz, his contemporary - Baron Antoine Henri Jomini, the ancient sage - Sun Tzu, and the modern scholar/practitioner - Mao Tsetung.

Paradigms to assist in the understanding of the culminating point of the defense will be developed. These models will be based on a relationship between the attacker's combat power and the defender's combat power over time. A number of variants will be examined to end the theoretical discussion.

A piece of theory is only valuable if it proves itself useful to the practitioner. The 'usefulness' of the theoretical concept of defensive culmination for operational level planners will be examined against three criteria:

- Is there evidence of the theory in historical campaigns?
- Is there evidence of the theory in current operational level doctrine?

- Is there evidence of the theory in emerging operational level concepts?

Collectively, these criteria will be called 'the Criteria of Usefulness.' The historical evidence may also provide indications of how previous operational artists used the concept.

The historical investigation will focus on two campaigns:

- the campaign for France in 1940
- Slim's Burma campaign in 1944-45.

These campaigns will be examined in several ways. The first depicts the use of the defensive culmination concept by operational level planners during the planning or conduct of the campaign. Secondly, the history is analyzed for how the proposed concept was used. Finally, the campaigns will be used to explain the different variants of the defensive culmination paradigm.

The second investigation will deal with the appearance of the defensive culmination concept in current United States Army doctrine. The focal point for discussion will be on the AirLand Battle doctrine espoused in FM 100-5. This manual considers doctrine at both the operational and tactical levels of warfighting, even though the primary focus of the analysis will be on the former.

The last investigation will examine the United States Army's emerging operational concept, AirLand Battle-Future, for evidence of defensive culmination. Those sections which discuss operational art will be the primary focus of the search. However, it must be realized that neither of these 'works' have been adopted yet as official doctrine.

Very few assumptions will be used. However, one major presumption must be discussed up front. The monograph's purpose is to examine the usefulness of defensive culmination to the operational level planner. The validity of defensive culmination is not the focus of the monograph, therefore the hypothesis is made that defensive culmination is a legitimate theoretical concept. However, the concept is one open to discussion and a sizable portion of the monograph will be concerned with the concept's development and understanding.

II. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Carl von Clausewitz is considered one of the great theoreticians of war. Many of the concepts from his masterpiece, On War, are evident in the United States Army's doctrine and theory. Included in these concepts are the culminating point of the attack,³ center of

gravity,⁴ and the concept that the defense is the stronger, but less decisive, form of war.⁵

His idea of offensive culmination is an important tool for today's operational level planners. Clausewitz discusses this concept in detail in two separate chapters of Book Seven, "The Attack," in On War.⁶ However, his thoughts on defensive culmination are not as evident.

Clausewitz does make references to defensive culmination in Book Six, "The Defense." However, these references are not in the same depth as his discussions on offensive culmination. The only direct mention of defensive culmination occurs in the following passage, "...the point of culmination will necessarily be reached when the defender must make up his mind and act, when the advantages of waiting have been completely exhausted...."⁷

Clausewitz links defensive culmination directly to the defender's seizing of the initiative. He views the culminating point for the defender as the chance for him to go over to the attack. Clausewitz believes that time is on the side of the defender because he can wait until the attacker is at his most vulnerable point, but he also assumes that the defender will "...have to take the initiative in the end...."⁸ He sums up this idea of defensive culmination in a powerfully worded,

almost zealous, passage calling it: "...A sudden powerful transition to the offensive - the flashing sword of vengeance ... the greatest moment for the defense...."⁹

An inference can be made that Clausewitz recognized one other form of defensive culmination. If a defender believes he cannot gain the advantage from the attacker in his initial positions, the defender may chose to withdraw to stronger positions and oppose the attacker there.¹⁰ A withdrawal with this purpose may gain several advantages for the defender:

- any advance causes the attacker to lose strength as he incurs losses and leaves garrisons¹¹

- the defender gains the time needed to mass sufficient force to seize the initiative¹²

- the attacker's advance lengthens his lines of communication and compounds his sustainment problems¹³

- the attacker loses his momentum and tires his force.¹⁴

A planned retreat may or may not be under pressure. Either one poses great risks for the defender. As he withdraws, a skillful attacker may be able to inflict greater casualties on the defender (similar to those found during the pursuit). Additionally, the defender may also suffer a negative moral impact because "...as a rule the people and the

army cannot even tell the difference between a planned retreat and a backward stumble.....15

Clausewitz spent two chapters discussing the concept of offensive culmination and communicated his thoughts about it in a well organized manner. He obviously recognized the culminating point for the defense as an important concept. However, his ideas concerning defensive culmination are scattered over almost one hundred pages. If Clausewitz had been able to rewrite his work before he died, his thoughts on defensive culmination might have been placed on an equal footing with its offensive counterpart.

Clausewitz's contemporary and rival, Baron Antoine Henri Jomini, also holds an important place in the development of American military theory. Although his star has waned in brilliance during this century, his influence can still be seen in United States Army warfighting doctrine. Many of his principles and theories can be recognized in the Army's current manuals.

One of the baron's more famous works is the Precis de l'Art de la Guerre, or Summary of the Art of War.

In order to glean Jomini's thoughts on defensive culmination from this work, one must search through it in the same manner as investigating On War for evidence of the concept. As with Clausewitz, there is no

chapter entitled 'The Culminating Point of the Defense.'

This parallel is not the only one on defensive culmination shared by these two theoreticians. Jomini's reflections on the concept produced ideas very similar to those found in Clausewitz's On War. As with the Prussian master, Jomini linked culmination with seizing the initiative.

The baron postulated two types of defense - passive and active (which he called the "defensive-offensive").¹⁶ In his writings about the active defense, one can find Jomini's primary thoughts on defensive culmination. He viewed the purpose of the defense as singular in nature -- to gain time. This delay causes the defender's adversary to be "...weakened by sending off detachments, by marches, and by privation and fatigue...."¹⁷ At the point when the attacker had lost his superiority, Jomini saw the defender's chance to seize the initiative and "...accomplish great successes...."¹⁸

Jomini places greater emphasis than Clausewitz on a retreat as a culminating point for a defense. He generally categorized retreats by a defender into two types: "...a retirement of his own accord before fighting..." or a retirement "...involuntarily after a lost battle...."¹⁹ The purpose of either being to

fall back and reconstitute the defense "...as soon as it [the defending army] shall have received expected reinforcements or reached a certain strategic position...."²⁰ Like Clausewitz, Jomini saw the same advantages and risks to the defender in these types of operations.

The two theoreticians have much in common when discussing defensive culmination. Jomini, however, was a bit more profuse in his consideration of the concept. He labeled "...one of the greatest talents of a general... [the ability] to take the initiative during the progress of a defensive war...."²¹ Proceeding further in this fashion, the baron summarized his thoughts on the concept in the following passage, "The best thing for an army on the defensive is to know *how* to take the offensive at a proper time, and to *take* it."²² That proper time could be aptly labeled the culminating point for the defense.

As with Jomini and Clausewitz, the ancient Chinese general, Sun Tzu, also has made an impression on the development of U. S. Army doctrine. However, this effect is nowhere near as important as the two Europeans'. Appropriately, the Chinaman's most consequential impact is of an indirect nature. Sun Tzu did have great influence on the works of B. H. Liddell Hart, through whose writings the United States Army has

moved away from a strategy of attrition to one of maneuver and the indirect approach.

As with the other theoreticians in this monograph, Sun Tzu does not straightforwardly deal with the concept of defensive culmination. The Art Of War, does not even contain a chapter devoted to the defense. Like Clausewitz and Jomini, his writing must be investigated in detail to understand his thoughts on defensive culmination.

Prior to Sun Tzu's time, war in China was primitive in nature. Either the attacker succeeded in penetrating his opponent's line or the defender repulsed him and the attacker was allowed to withdraw.²³ About 500 B.C., societies and the reasons they went to war changed. Now the outcome of operations not only had great impact upon the soldiers, but upon the country for which they fought as well. Massive armies with independent subdivisions came into being and generals who could control such large forces were in great demand. Sun Tzu was just such a general.

In step with more modern writers, Sun Tzu saw the defense as the stronger form of war, but with a negative aim: "Invincibility lies in the defense; the possibility of victory in the attack."²⁴ The defense was only an expedient to be used when "...strength is

inadequate...."²⁵ If the defense must be used, how then does an army transition to the attack?

The defender must see the opportunity to transition, then act swiftly and decisively.²⁶ Sun Tzu saw this point as the time for the defender to seize the initiative and go over to the offensive. This time could occur after weakening the attacker in battle or by withdrawing and exhausting him. It may even occur prior to the attack, if the defender waited and the difference in strength between the defender and attacker grew larger.²⁷

Sun Tzu also saw a retirement as a form of culmination, although his work is not as clear on this point. The retirement's purpose is to set the conditions for a successful defense and/or future offensive action. By drawing the enemy onto unfavorable ground, the defender might be able to gain the advantage and weaken the enemy while remaining inferior in strength. Additionally, the enemy may exhaust himself during the pursuit and the defender would gain the superiority needed to attack. Conversely, an inopportune or ill-conducted retirement may cause the army to be hobbled and lead to its destruction.²⁸

A conceptualization of Sun Tzu's version of defensive culmination does not differ much from the

more contemporary representations by Clausewitz and Jomini. The chance to seize initiative by the defender is the point of culmination for the defense. One minor point of variance may be Sun Tzu's lack of emphasis on retirement as a form of defensive culmination. However, another student of Sun Tzu would amplify the ancient master's thoughts on withdrawal.

Mao Tsetung is considered by some to be Sun Tzu's most noteworthy pupil. His writings on protracted war are dogma to many modern day revolutionaries. However, Mao would probably be among the first to say that his ideas only could apply in China while fighting the Japanese and Nationalist Chinese forces. In spite of this disclaimer, the framework of Mao's theory reads like a primer on operational art. His works tell of campaign planning, branches and sequels, lines of operation, lines of support, and culminating points.

Mao's doctrine is based on his experience of fighting a revolutionary war against a numerically superior foe in the vast expanses of China. His emphasis on the defense is a result of lessons learned by the Communists over almost a decade. Because of his experience, he viewed "...the primary problem... [as] how to conserve...strength and await an opportunity to defeat the enemy. Therefore, the

strategic defensive is the most complicated...problem facing the Red Army...."²⁹

Mao categorized the strategic defense into two types: active and passive. At the time of his writings in 1938, the Red Chinese had only experienced success with the active defense, which Mao called, "...the offensive defense , or defense of decisive engagements...."³⁰ He further subdivided the active defense into two phases: the strategic retreat and the strategic counter-offensive.³¹

The writings on the two phases of the defense contain most of his thoughts on defensive culmination. As with the other theoreticians, Mao saw the defense's culminating point as the point at which the defender should wrest the initiative away from the attacker and attack. But unlike the others, he placed more emphasis on the decision to retreat as a defensive culminating point. Despite this emphasis, Mao did not consider the retreat as the first choice for the defense.

Ideally, the defender should be able to wear down the attacker from his initial positions. However, when faced with a vastly superior enemy, the defender has reached a culminating point. He must change the complexion of the defense or gamble with destruction. At this point, the defender should take the initiative

and retreat for the purposes of conserving his force and preparing for the counter-offensive.³²

The preparation for the next phase of the strategic defensive would be accomplished by "...select[ing] or creat[ing] conditions favorable to the [defender], but unfavorable to the enemy, so as to bring about a change in the balance of forces...."³³ Once these conditions were met, then the defense would reach another culminating point and move over to the counter-offensive. The moment at which this transition occurs is one of the critical points in the strategic defense. Mao considered its timing of the utmost importance.

Mao's concept of defensive culmination is more refined and extensive than the other theorists' thoughts. He wrote in much greater detail on the decision to conduct strategic retreat as a culminating point. As lengthy as his considerations are, the essence can be summed up in his 'sixteen character' formula for the basic principles of guerrilla warfare. "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue."³⁴

The theorists whose works were investigated in the preceding pages are, in general, not as thorough on the concept of defensive culmination as they are the

culminating point of the attack. However, two common ideas of the concept come through very clearly. First, the defensive culminating point can be defined as the point when the defender is able to seize the initiative from the attacker. Secondly, this initiative takes one of two forms: a counter-offensive or a strategic withdrawal.

III. PARADIGMS

In order to better understand defensive culmination, a series of paradigms can be developed which illustrate the conduct of defensive campaigns with different outcomes. The graphing of both the attacker's and the defender's relative combat power over time will help to visualize the points during a campaign where defensive culmination occurs.³⁵

The paradigm is designed to help visualize the concept of defensive culmination. It is not intended to scientifically prove the theory. No scales are given for the X- or the Y-axis. The model is only a tool to assist the reader.

The first variant of the model (Figure 1) describes the counteroffensive after a successful defense. The defensive culmination point occurs as the defender's combat power grows large enough for the

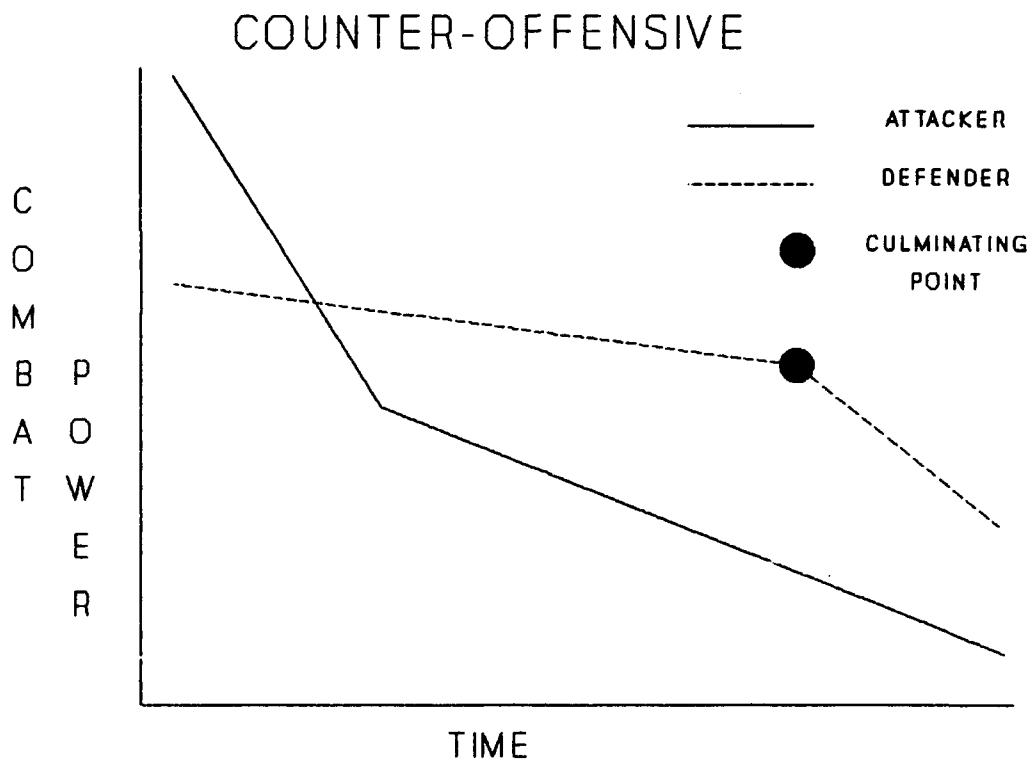


FIGURE 1

defender to counterattack. The defender acquires enough of a combat power advantage over the attacker to remain permanently on the offense. Even though the defender's casualty rate increases as the counter-offensive begins, the original attacker has been so weakened by his assault that he becomes combat ineffective before the defender does.

The second version (Figure 2 - next page) models the outcome when the defender reaches a culminating point and is unable to generate enough combat power to

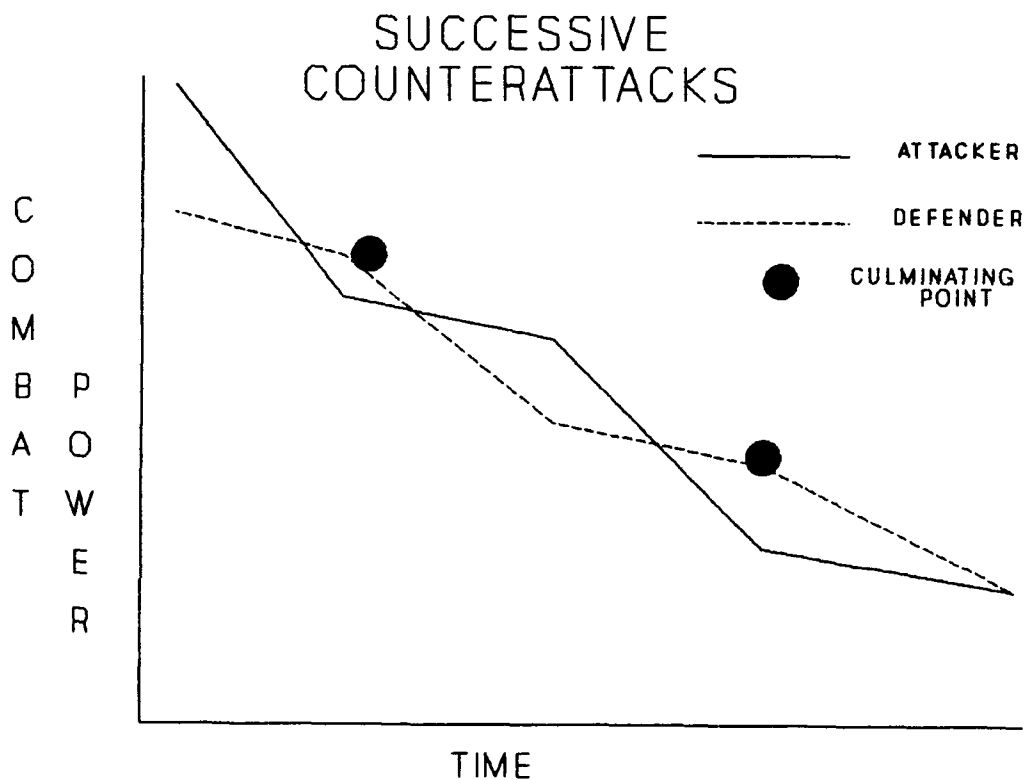


FIGURE 2

conduct a successful counteroffensive. But, he can counterattack to diminish the attacker's combat power or increase his own. Because the defender does not have the relative combat power for a sustained counteroffensive, the two opponents seesaw between the attack and the defense. If the defender ignores this culmination, he may give the attacker the chance to pause and regenerate enough combat power to continue the offensive at more favorable odds.

Two other versions of the paradigm illustrate the results when the defender misjudges the time to seize the initiative. In the first model (Figure 3 -below) the defender has launched the counterattack (or counteroffensive) prematurely. Consequently, he never generates enough combat power relative to his enemy for the assault to be successful and the defense fails.

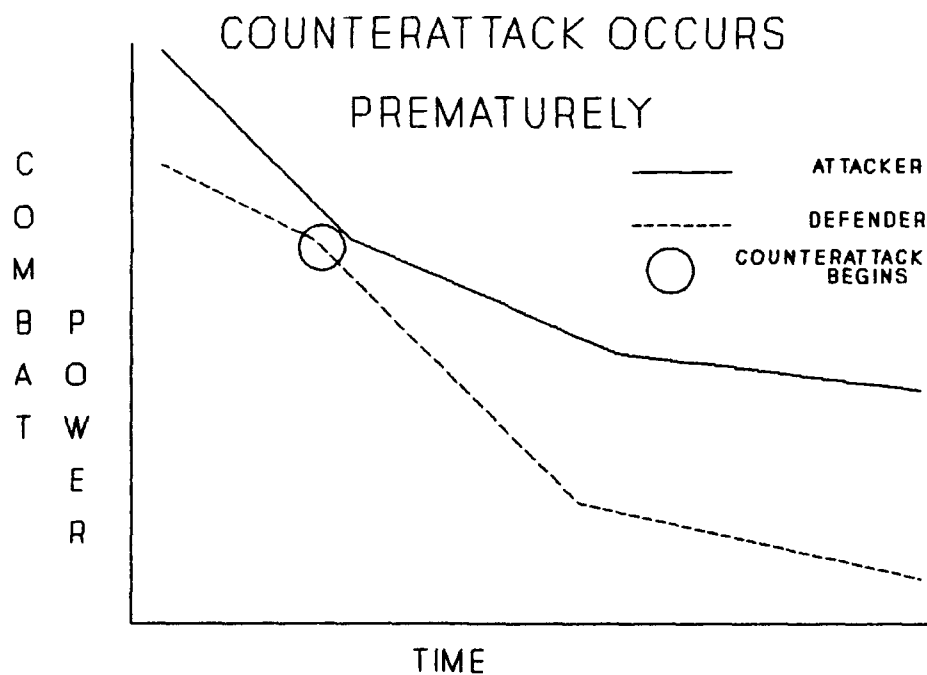


FIGURE 3

Similarly, the second model (Figure 4 - next page) demonstrates the result when the defender ignores the culmination for too long and allows the attacker to regenerate combat power before the defender counterattacks.

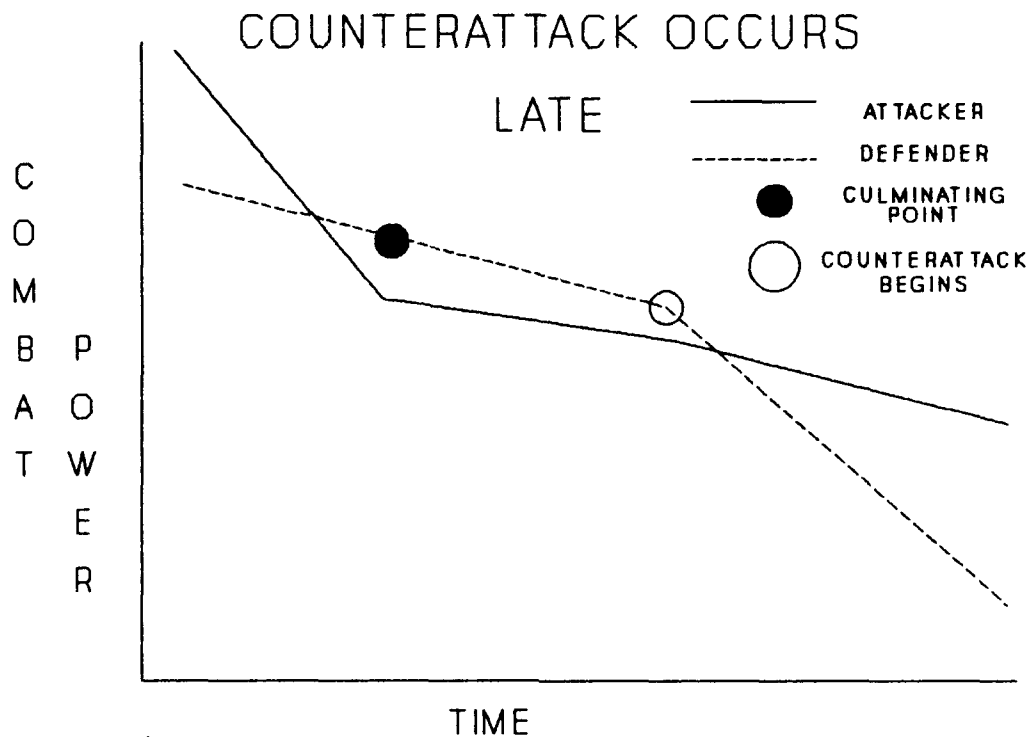


FIGURE 4

The next diagram (Figure 5 - next page) depicts the defense culminating with a retreat or withdrawal. The defender realizes that he is unable to create a sufficient amount of combat power to undertake a counterattack. However, continuing the defense in its present form may result in the destruction of the force. The defender has been able to seize the initiative and moves to gain position, or time, to generate additional combat power. The miscalculation of this form of defensive culmination can result in the

defender being unable to reconstitute the defense and suffer total defeat.

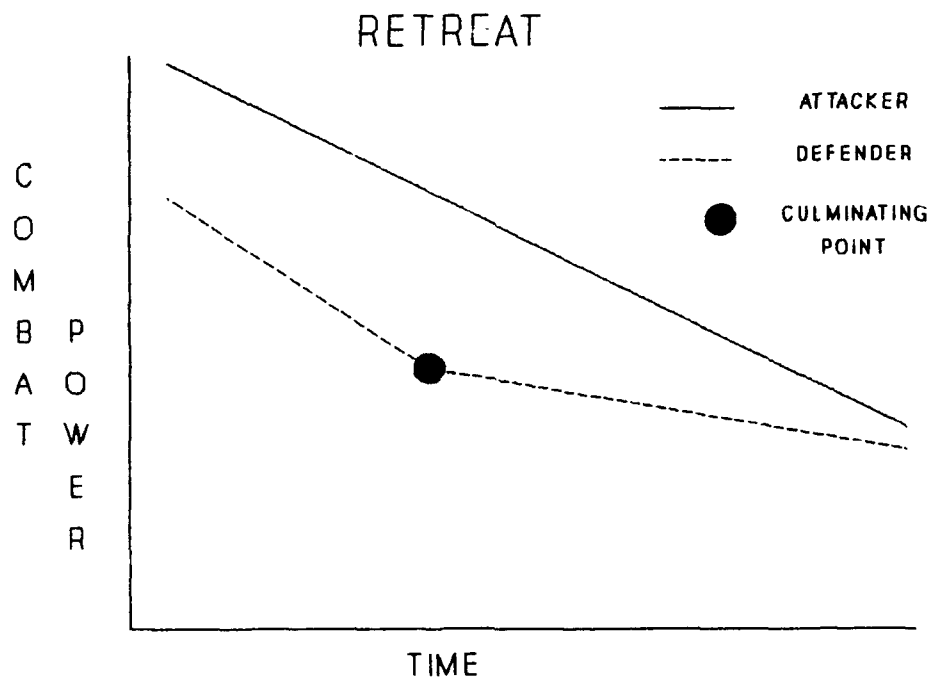


FIGURE 5

The final application of the paradigm (Figure 6 - next page) shows the outcome when the defender chooses to retain his original defense after a culminating point has been reached. In this case, the defender should have retreated. Remaining in the defense without any changes occurring in the relative combat power between the defender and the attacker can result in failure of the defense. Additionally, one other point about the culminating point of the defense is

portrayed. The second culminating point occurs when the defense fails and defender must concede victory or face total destruction.

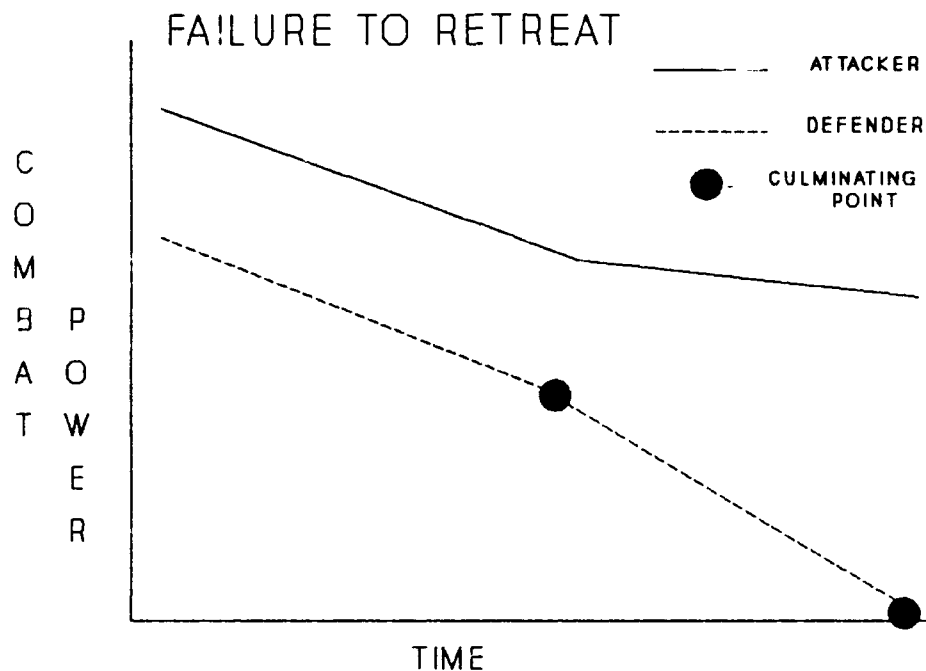


FIGURE 6

Three distinct defensive culminating points emerge from the different versions of the paradigm. Two of these models share the common aspect of the defender seizing the initiative. That initiative leads the defender to decide upon conducting either a counterattack or a retreat. The other defensive culminating point occurs when the defender refuses to seize the initiative at the proper time or is unable to do so. The result in this case is defeat.

IV. CRITERIA OF USEFULNESS

The concept of defensive culmination becomes important to the practice of operational art only if it is used by operational level planners in the design of campaigns or major operations. The investigation of operational art at each stage of time (past, present, and future) provides a criterion which may show the usefulness of the defensive culmination concept. When grouped together, the three criteria will be called the Criteria of Usefulness. As previously advanced in the introduction, the more specific natures of the Criteria of Usefulness are:

- Is there evidence of the theory in historical campaigns?
- Is there evidence of the theory in current operational level doctrine?
- Is there evidence of the theory in emerging operational level concepts?

The historical investigation will look at two campaigns from World War II for indications of defensive culmination. These indications may be present in the planning stage or appear in the decision making process of the commanders during a campaign's actual conduct. The Second World War was selected

because operational art had evolved close to its present form. This conflict is also the first modern war in which the United States played an important role in the designing of joint and combined campaigns.

The focus of the second criterion's investigation will be current United States Army AirLand Battle doctrine. FM 100-5 will be the primary document used for this study. Once again the appearance of defensive culmination and, if present, how it is used will be the basis for the inquiry.

The same methodology will be used in the examination of emerging operational concepts. In this case, the centerpiece of the discussion will be the AirLand Battle-Future concept. As with the current doctrine investigation, the appearance of defensive culmination and its use by operational level planners are the principal forms of evidence to be gathered.

The lack of evidence in any of the criteria does not necessarily discount the usefulness of the defensive culmination concept. As shown in a previous section, some of the great theorists on war did not formally recognize the concept with the same clarity as they did offensive culmination. The great generals of the past and the writers of current and future doctrine are for the most part students of these theorists.

Sometimes these generals and writers through study and analysis pick out useful tools which are otherwise hidden in the works of the theorists.

V. HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

The German campaign on the Western Front in May and June of 1940 resulted in the complete defeat of France. The Wehrmacht never gave up the initiative. They reached the culminating point for their offensive only with the surrender of France on 25 June.

The defensive culmination for the French occurred because the Germans were able to encircle the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the majority of the French First Army Group, and the Army of Belgium against the coast at Dunkirk. The French and British never conducted more than limited counterattacks to halt the German drive through the Ardennes to Abbeville on the coast. Nor were the counterattacks to break the encirclement of sufficient strength to succeed.

The exact timing of the defensive culmination can be argued. The first possibility occurred with the initiation of Plan D to move the BEF and elements of the First French Army Group into Belgium to defend on the River Dyle on 10 May. The next prospect is the

actual breakthrough in the Ninth French Army's sector, the Ardennes, by Hoth's and Guderian's corps on 15 May. A third possibility is when von Kleist's Panzer Group physically reached the Channel coast on the twenty first of May. The last possibility is the 24th when the Weygand plan to counterattack and penetrate the "panzer corridor"³⁶ was called off. After this, no linkup with the encircled British and French forces at Dunkirk was possible. The actual time of the defensive culmination is not as important as when and what the Allied commanders decided to do once they realized that it had arrived.

Lord Gort, commanding the BEF and by *de facto* all the other forces in the encirclement, reacted first. On the 23rd of May, he perceived that the defensive culmination had occurred. The British believed "... that the whole success of the Weygand plan was dependent on the French taking the initiative, which they showed no signs of doing...."³⁷ Gort further concluded that even if the Weygand plan was executed, the eight infantry divisions which would conduct it could not achieve a linkup. Acting on these convictions, he terminated the defense of France by the encircled forces. A retreat towards the Channel was ordered and the evacuation to England, known as the "Miracle of Dunkirk,"³⁸ was begun.

The French fought on against the Germans. The last line of defense was the Weygand Line, behind the Somme and Aisne Rivers. It was manned by approximately 45 French and British divisions. Facing the Allies were over 104 German divisions. Furthermore, they outnumbered the Allies in heavy divisions more than three to one.³⁹

The French still hoped for their own miracle - similar to the one that saved Paris in World War One.⁴⁰ Failing that, the French commander, General Maxime Weygand believed "...that he should fight one last battle, 'for the sake of honor'...."⁴¹ Then, the French would sue for peace.⁴²

The Germans attacked on 4 June. In less than two weeks, they pushed the French back over 200 miles. The French government finally yielded to the inevitable and asked for an armistice on 17 June. The surrender was signed 5 days later and went into effect on the twenty-fifth of June.

Weygand knew his army had reached the culminating point when his counterattack to relieve the forces in the north never occurred. Faced with a choice of immediate surrender or a possible retreat to North Africa, he chose to fight on for almost another month. His decision to ignore the culmination cost the French and British thousands of more casualties and the almost

total disintegration of the French army. In the end, his 'one last battle' only finalized the disgrace of his country and its military.

From their statements and actions both commanders realized the defense had culminated. Action had to be taken or total defeat was unavoidable. The two groups of forces shared three common options: surrender their troops, continue the defense, or retreat. The results of Gort's and Weygand's actions approximate the defensive culmination paradigms shown in Figures 5 and 6. Lord Gort accurately assessed the situation -- defensive culmination or total defeat. He accepted the risk of a withdrawal and began the retreat to Dunkirk. Almost 340,000 French and British soldiers were evacuated. Weygand chose to gamble and continued the defense with disastrous results. Three years later on the other side of the world, another commander faced a similar decision as Gort and Weygand.

By late 1943, the British had recovered from the early disasters in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. However, their counteroffensive had culminated in December on the Chindwin River. Lieutenant General William Slim, commanding the Fourteenth Army, realized the Japanese were about to conduct a major attack across the River to seize Imphal and Kohima. In Japanese hands, these two key towns would be the

springboard for future operations to complete the destruction of the British forces.⁴³

Slim assessed his situation and determined that under the circumstances the advantages were with his enemy. The Fourteenth Army would have to disperse its units and defend along the entire length of the Chindwin in their sector. Additionally, the terrain afforded no chance for the British forces to move laterally and reinforce each other. Finally, from their current position, the lengthy lines of communication from India were a major weakness.⁴⁴

Slim considered three courses of action:

- "- To anticipate the enemy offensive by crossing the Chindwin and attacking him first.
- To hold the [enemy] in the [south] and fight with all available forces on the line of the Chindwin, hoping to destroy the enemy as he crossed the river, with part of his forces on each bank.
- To concentrate 4 Corps in the Imphal plain and fight the decisive battle there on ground of our own choosing."⁴⁵

Slim chose the third option, even though he realized the results a withdrawal might have on the morale of his force.⁴⁶

In general, Slim saw three possible reasons for withdrawing:

- to save the force
- actions in other sectors which require reinforcements
- "...to draw the enemy into a situation so unfavorable to him that the initiative must pass to you...."⁴⁷

In this case, he needed to concentrate his combat power against the attacking Japanese and set the conditions for his future counteroffensive to the Irrawaddy River. He also wanted the Japanese to deal with the disadvantages the terrain provided in this part of Burma.⁴⁸

Slim made his plans based on the enemy offensive beginning after the middle of March 1944. Unfortunately, Slim by his own admission did not realize the risk of the withdrawal starting too late. The Japanese forces attacked a week earlier than the British predicted.

However, Slim's plan still worked. The withdrawal was somewhat riskier under pressure, but with some courageous rear guard actions the British were able to fall back to the Imphal plain. The Japanese crashed against the concentrated combat power of the 14th Army

at Imphal and Kohima; and just as Slim had intended, their attack was spent against the steadiness of the Commonwealth troops in their fixed defenses. Slim's counterattack began in May and concluded at the Irrawaddy with an operational pause.⁴⁹

The 1944 Burma Campaign is an excellent recounting of a operational level commander using the concept of defensive culmination as an integral part of his plan. Slim's decision making and vision of the operation are modeled by the versions of the paradigm shown in Figures 1 and 5. William Slim is an excellent example of a commander who not only studied and analyzed his art, but could apply that art with great expertise on the battlefield.

In the two campaigns studied, none of the commanders formally recognized the theoretical concept of defensive culmination. However, an analysis of the campaigns shows that by their actions they used defensive culmination within the framework of their operations. Both Gort and Weygand in 1940 recognized their inability to seize the initiative, but each reacted in a different way. Gort chose to retreat and fight at another time. Weygand realized that all was lost and chose to fight the battle through to its end, gambling for a miracle to save France. On the other hand, Slim was able to visualize the point of

culmination for his defense. He planned to retreat and reconstitute the defense at a place to his advantage. The two examples lend proof to the assertion that defensive culmination is not just a theoretical concept without use to the practitioner. It has utility to the operational artist both during the design and conduct of his campaign.

VI. DOCTRINE INVESTIGATION

The focus of this investigation for evidence of defensive culmination will be current United States Army doctrine, designated by the military as AirLand Battle doctrine. FM 100-5, Operations, is the capstone document for promulgating the practical thrust of this warfighting theory. The manual deals primarily at the operational and tactical levels of war. Operational art as viewed in this publication will be the main interest of this study to identify the appearance and utility of defensive culmination.

In the section dedicated to the "key concepts of operational design,"⁵⁰ an entire segment is concerned with culminating points. Like most of the theorists, the discussion of culmination directly considers the concept of the culminating point for the offense.

However, only indirect mention is made of defensive culmination.

Current AirLand Battle doctrine considers the "...culminating points [as] equally important to the ... defender...."⁵¹ The defender must be able to sense when the attacker has become overstretched. This is the point for the defender to "...pass over to the counter offensive before the attacker is able to recover his strength...."⁵²

The manual also addresses other options facing the defender. For example, he can trade space for time by deciding to relocate in order to fight from more defensible terrain or gain reinforcements. This withdrawal also has the purpose of overextending the attacker, thereby gaining a relative advantage in combat power. In this situation, the defender "...must seek to bring the enemy...to or past [his] culminating point before [the attack] reaches an operationally decisive objective...."⁵³ As in Slim's campaign, the retreat has the intention of weakening the enemy and "...thus create the opportunity to shift to the offensive...."⁵⁴

The doctrine throughout the defensive portions of the manual calls for the defender to retain freedom of action. The defender should avoid decisive battles

until the pendulum has moved through the nadir of the culmination point and swung the advantage to the defender's side. After reaching an apex, the pendulum then begins its swing back towards the culminating point. The arc formed on the defender's side of the pendulum's swing is the time for him to seize the offensive initiative and counterattack.

Eventually, the defender "...reaches a point at which he must act or lose the opportunity to take the initiative for an extended period or even permanently...."⁵⁵ This point could be labeled as another culmination of the defense. Failure to act leaves the defender with a "...choice between a slim chance for immediate success or a prolonged defense with no prospect of winning...."⁵⁶ In other words, the defender has given up the chance for victory.

American Army doctrine places great emphasis on culminating points. But like the works of the theorists discussed earlier, the reader is left waiting for a definitive concept of defensive culmination. Instead, the hints of the concept are spread throughout the manual. However, a critical analysis of the doctrine leaves no doubt as to the importance of defensive culmination and how the operational artist must use it in the conduct and design of campaigns or major operations.

VII. FUTURE CONCEPTS INVESTIGATION

The third criterion investigates the United States Army's emerging operational concept, AirLand Battle-Future, for the appearance of defensive culmination. In the Army's system, operational concepts evolve into the doctrine of the future. The concept of AirLand Battle-Future is expected to become the warfighting doctrine for the Army in 1995 and be applicable through the early part of the 21st century.

AirLand Battle-Future is not a revolutionary concept. It is more an expansion of the current doctrine to remain relevant in light of the rapidly changing world and national situation. "...The conceptual ideas, all the tenets and imperatives, and the battlefield framework in current ALB doctrine (FM 100-5) are applicable to this umbrella concept...."⁵⁷

The major focus at the operational level will shift in AirLand Battle-Future. Current doctrine is the result of a linear, defensive mindset.⁵⁸ However, the combat envisioned in ALB-F will place greater emphasis on "...a non-linear, more offensive approach to warfare...."⁵⁹ This nonlinear battlefield will provide the "...commander greater opportunities to exercise initiative..."⁶⁰ even when on the defense.

Despite the increased attention on the offense, the operational defense will not go away. The way it is conducted at the tactical level is the crux of the change. Combat forces on the defensive will no longer dig in and wait for the enemy to come to them. Rather, the attacker will be sought out and destroyed by a combination of long range fires and maneuver forces. The four phases of this tactical battle are:

- Detect
- Fires
- Maneuver
- Reconstitute.⁶¹

The switch from the defensive form to the offensive form at the defensive culmination point may not be as radical a change as it is in the current doctrine. The original scenarios called for the United States forces to initially be on the defense at the operational level. Not much analysis has been conducted on the offensive operations after the enemy forces have been destroyed in the initial phase. The major difference for the defender between the defense and counterattack is the replacement of a moving attacker with a less active enemy.

The attacker may not be destroyed in the initial phase and continue his advance. The need to understand the defensive culmination point and the actions

required to defeat this still attacking enemy may entail greater risk for the defender. The defending operational commander must be able to read the situation clearly. He must then determine how best to defeat an attacker moving into the operational depth of the defense. As in the current doctrine, the answer may be either to continue the defense or retreat in order to reestablish the defense.

A continuation of the current defense may quickly return to a more linear style of war. The attacker will have also closed the distances between himself and the defender. Therefore, the space necessary to execute the first two tactical phases of AirLand Battle-Future will not be available.

A return to the defense as portrayed in ALB-F will require the defender to retreat and reestablish the depth necessary for the detection and battle areas.⁶² The ability for the defender to successfully accomplish the retreat is obviously dependent on the situation which exists in regards to time and space available. For example, a failed defense which initially uses Poland for the original detection and battle areas needs space to reestablish the new areas. However, the operational commander may not have the flexibility for political reasons of using the area in old East Germany for the new detection and battle areas.

Obviously, there is much work still to be done before AirLand Battle-Future becomes doctrine. The line between offense and defense described by the theorists and FM 100-5 begins to blur under this new concept. However, as described above, the concept of defensive culmination still has utility to an operational commander both in execution and the planning of branches or sequels to his original campaign.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Theoretically, the concept of defensive culmination would appear to have just as much usefulness to the defender as offensive culmination does to the attacker. The attacker must plan to attain his objectives prior to his culminating point or build pauses into his campaign plan. Likewise, the defender must also prepare for the time when the form of the defense must change.

From the two campaigns investigated, defensive culmination was an important concept in both planning and execution. Slim especially understood the concept, and planned his defense to avoid the disadvantages of culmination at the end of a long line of communication. From his original positions, the best he could have

hoped for was to defeat the Japanese and achieve a stalemate. Neither Gort nor Weygand had planned for the culmination of their defense. However, both commanders recognized and reacted to the event.

Current United States Army doctrine also recognizes the usefulness of culminating points to operational planners. However, FM 100-5 is not as clear about defensive culmination as it is about the culminating point of the attack. Nevertheless, the doctrine does point out the importance of the defender seizing the initiative at the proper time and going over to the offense.

Another major consideration in current doctrine is setting the stage for the success of the future counteroffensive. This is one of the primary purposes of the defense. The commander must realize when the present form, or location, of the defense is unsuitable and take action to change it. Even if this means withdrawing and reconstituting the defense with a result of overextending the attacker.

The examination of the AirLand Battle-Future concept also does not reveal a clearly articulated definition or proposed use for defensive culmination. In this emerging concept, the initiative to attack is built into the very essence of the defense. With success, the difference between defense and attack is

extremely muddled. The answer to one difficult question still needs to be developed. If the attacking force is not destroyed, what steps does the defender now take to reconstitute the defense? The resulting operation may require actions which is not covered by the concept as it is now developed. Hopefully, as the doctrine emerges from the operational concept, the concept of defensive culmination will receive greater consideration.

From the three investigations of the criteria, the concept of defensive culmination has use to the operational level planner. The commander must consider when the defense must change its form to the attack or move to be conducted under more advantageous conditions. The defender must know when to seize the initiative and based on a proper analysis of the situation take the correct actions to culminate the attacker before his objectives are realized. These actions are counterattack, conduct a counteroffensive, or retreat to a more advantageous defense.

Continuation of the current defense at the defensive culmination point is not a viable course of action. If the defense has truly reached its culminating point, a continuation of the defense in its present form will always lead to defeat and gamble with the total destruction of the force.

IX. SUMMARY

The concept of defensive culmination was discussed in a theoretical context. An examination of works from four theorists showed a consistent perception of a defensive culminating point. Although in all four cases, the authors did not directly address the idea in great detail. Nevertheless, an analysis of their works led to a realization of the concept.

The 'Criteria of Usefulness' examined the concept from three angles. Investigations into past, present, and future applications by operational artists showed the concept to be useful not only in theory, but in doctrine and practice as well. However, as the concepts of AirLand Battle-Future evolve into doctrine more analysis of defensive culmination is clearly required.

Whether the defense ends in Clausewitz's 'flashing sword of vengeance' or the risk of Slim's retreat to the Imphal plain, defensive culmination is a useful tool for the operational level planner. Either way the defender must seize the initiative and compel the attacker to 'dance to his tune.'⁶³ The defender's attempt to set these conditions for victory may well depend on how accurately he judges and applies the concept of defensive culmination.

ENDNOTES

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3. Ibid., pp. 181-182.
4. Ibid., pp. 179-180.
5. Ibid., p. 129.
6. Clausewitz, p. 528 and pp. 566-573.
7. Clausewitz, p. 383.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 370.
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12. Ibid., p. 470.
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16. Baron Antoine Henri Jomini, Summary of the Art of War from Roots of Strategy Book 2. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1987), p. 463.
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24. Ibid., p. 85.
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26. Ibid., p. 43.
27. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
28. Ibid., pp. 80-81, pp. 96-97, and p. 125.
29. Ibid., p. 103.
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33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 111.
35. This model was used previously in Seminar 2 of the Advanced Military Studies Program, Class of 1991, to help explain offensive culmination. It was first presented by Major Charles D. Allen.
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41. Ibid., pp. 623-624.
42. Ibid., p. 624.
43. William Slim, Defeat into Victory, (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1956), p. 285.

44. Two sources cited. Slim, pp. 287-289. Louis Allen, Burma The Longest War 1941-45, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984), pp. 188-189.
45. Slim, pp. 290-291.
46. Ibid., pp. 291-292.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 291.
49. Ibid., pp. 347-369.
50. FM 100-5, p. 179.
51. Ibid., p. 182.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p.131.
55. Ibid., p. 141.
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57. Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, "AirLand Battle Future Umbrella Concept (Draft)," USACGSC Directors' OPD Read Ahead Packet, Future-AirLand Battle, (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, July 1990), p. 20.
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59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 4.
61. Ibid., p. 12.
62. Ibid., p. 10.
63. Slim, p. 292.

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